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FORMER PRESIDENT, UNITED CONSTRUCTION WORKERS ASSOCIATION

INTERVIEWEE: TYREE SCOTT

INTERVIEWERS: WILLIAM LITTLE

SUBJECTS: DEPARTMENT OF LABOR; OFFICE OF FEDERAL CONTRACT COMPLIANCE;
RICHARD NIXON ADMINISTRATION; HOMETOWN PLAN; ARTHUR FLETCHER; ROBERT
MCCONNELL; GEORGE SHULTZ; PETER BRENNAN; TRADE UNION BUREAUCRACY

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[00:00:00] **TYREE:** Do you have specific questions about—

[00:00:12] **WILLIAM:** No, just talk about the role. What did they do?

[00:00:15] **TYREE:** The federal government?

[00:00:16] **WILLIAM:** Well, the various departments of it. I'm not so concerned with the county and the state, that's straightforward, but the feds...

[00:00:27] **TYREE:** Well, the federal government had at the time—when we're talking about it, we've got to look at that particular time in history, and what was the posture of the government in terms of the trade union movement, because there was a contradiction between the Department of Labor and the [Nixon] administration. The Department of Labor, by and large, is made up of trade union bureaucrats that got entrenched during the Democratic administrations, I assume. But the average person in any situation in the trade union movement—

Robert McConnell is the man in Washington [D.C.] who heads up the Manpower Division of the Labor Department. That division is a division where the money for manpower goes to. Robert McConnell is a trade union bureaucrat who is also a racist, who came from the trade union movement, and so he was there to protect the interest of the trade unions. Well, the interest of trade unions taking in an excess amount of workers is [?an emergency?] to the trade unions, and so they have to guard against that. But because Robert McConlen and the people in the office he worked in had control over kinds of manpower money that went out, they didn't supplement it, the trade union movement in this country, in this outreach program to train and develop skilled workers or whatever.

And so the international plumbers union [United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters] got a million dollars to train Black workers, to train workers, to train workers coming into the trade union. But they've never been able to show results of that, but also you have to keep in mind that McConnell's interest was not to show results in that. It was not to clamp down on the plumbers union for not doing the job. The intent never was to do the job in the first place, the intent was to be able to create those kinds of programs and those kinds of front groups to make it look like they were doing something on one hand, and on the other hand pay for it, because it costs money to hire those people.

The AFL-CIO has a program called Human Resource Development Institute, HRDI. They've got an office here in Seattle, headed by a Black laborer by the name of George Williams. George Williams was hand-picked by Austin St. Laurent and other members of the building trades. He's always shown a lot of hostility toward us, dual unionism or whatever else. But they took him out of the ditch and put him in a coat and tie, and gave him the salary of twenty thousand dollars a year out of the tax payers' money that came from the Department of Labor, from the Manpower Division of the Department of Labor. And that's duplicated everywhere else in the country. So that was the role of Robert McConnell, who was a trade union bureaucrat in the Department of Labor.

The Office of Federal Contract Compliance is in the Department of Labor, and the Office of Federal Contract Compliance's role was created specifically to enforce Executive Order 11246. And so let's look at that now. The executive order—the muscle of the executive order was that if there was an employee somewhere who was not abiding by the executive order, then his contract could be removed from him. But in 1965 when it was signed, they had a staff of like thirty-two people around 1969, and half of the staff was in the Labor Department, in Washington [D.C.] .

[00:05:08] **WILLIAM:** A staff of what?

[00:05:09] **TYREE:** About thirty-two people. You can find out from James Warren, the regional director here, what the size of the staff was at the time. But it was a really small staff. I mean, it was less people than one person per state, if you take away the bureaucrats in Washington [D.C.] . And so they were charged with enforcing the guidelines of the executive order, or they were in charge of making sure employers did not discriminate. And for example, they had one guy in the Northwest Region that was covering an eight state area. So there was never any intent to enforce it, but they had this agency there that was in the Department of Labor.

And let's take what Peter Brennan—at the time the Secretary of Labor was George Shultz, at the very beginning. But George Schultz left and Peter Brennan became the head of the Labor Department. Peter Brennan had a history in New York of his racist policies in the trade unions, his backward policies of keeping Blacks and Puerto Ricans out of the trade unions. And so now we've got the devil trying to put out the fire. And so there was resistance on his part. But the Nixon administration decided at that point in time, in the 1960's, that it was in the best interests to have these Black insurgent groups from around the country raising those issues inside the trade union movement. And so in order to affirm that, it manifested itself in Seattle with the administration sending out five Justice Department lawyers to litigate a lawsuit against five building trade unions: U.S. vs. [Ironworkers] Local 86. So here we've got this fight going on with us and stuff, and we get that kind of support from the federal government. So what you've got now on one hand is the career bureaucrats inside the Labor Department resisting this kind of change, resisting Blacks coming into the building trades, and you've got the administration people, for whatever reasons, pushing this kind of thing.

Well, inside the Labor Department was Arthur Fletcher, who was the other contradiction in the Labor Department. He was putting forward a position, a new concept that imposed his specifications: Hometown Plans, or Philadelphia Plans. So with the support of George Shultz, the Secretary of Labor who is not from labor, and Richard Nixon, who ain't from labor, he [Nixon] is not running around the country talking about this new thing of bringing people into the building trades. And so he developed these Hometown Plans. Basically, what they mean is that with the authority of the executive office—the executive office gives them the authority to set goals and time tables to bring Third World workers into the building trades. And of course, the punishment is that employers can have the contracts removed for not meeting those federal specifications.

So you have Arthur Fletcher as Assistant Secretary of Labor who's in charge of Federal Contract Compliance, formulating these new plans, these goals with timetables in them, traveling around. And you have the building trades resisting it and the rest of the Labor Department resisting it, with the exception of the top people. It was like two years after the Philadelphia Plan and all of this notoriety, all of these court hearings and all of that, that they were claiming something like ten to twelve people that got into the building trades in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, a city with a population of almost half a million Black people. And so that wasn't working, but there was a lot of politics going on, and it was good politics with Fletcher to build that kind of base. He had a supportive administration.

However, a year or so later, the administration's policies shifted. George Shultz left the Labor Department, Peter Brennan came from New York, Arthur Fletcher was quieted down. Six months later Arthur Fletcher found himself at the United Nations. There was a John Wilks, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Office of Federal Contract Compliance, or the director of the Office of Federal Contract Compliance was moved. So he then became like Fletcher's man who was enforcing the executive order through the OFCC. He was then sent to the White House and is now on the White House's staff as a minority advisor to the president or something. What his job is, I don't know. And they brought in somebody else to head up the OFCC. Then the OFCC was then downgraded and put under the Bureau of Labor Standards or something inside the Labor Department. So the shift in politics in the administration showed that the emphasis from the government shifted on the enforcement of the order.

The result of that in Seattle, we have gone from no authority to get Blacks into trade, except for paper executive order, to a lawsuit that had been litigated and unions found guilty, and a requirement put on them to take in X number of Black workers annually, and an imposed plan that required employers doing business with the government to have—at the time, we got thirteen percent of the workforce had to be Third World workers. So that's where we found ourselves at, at that point in time, 1972 or three. But with the change in policy of the

administration and Nixon all romancing the hardhats, Peter Brennan, the Secretary of Labor, wiped out all the requirements. What the lawsuit had done was provide a mechanism for Third World workers entering into the building trades unions. What the executive order had done in the best specifications being imposed had provided them to be placed on the job, one day with the trade unions, the other with the employers.

By 1963 [sic,] , it was wiped out. They removed the best specification requirements and imposed what they called a voluntary plan, and they reduced the numbers—there were no numbers. They were required by law to have thirteen percent. All of a sudden, Peter Brennan says they don't have to have none. That basically was what it was. We filed a lawsuit, UCWA vs. Peter Brennan.

[00:12:57] **WILLIAM:** Got a copy of that around here?

[00:13:00] **TYREE:** [Michael] Fox has got it. They conceded on it. But instead of placing on back at thirteen percent, they decided to go back and check the census reports to prove that we did, in fact, only need to have eight percent. So now we're now operating on some figures of 8.2%. But that's been the role of the government in terms of enforcing the requirements for equitable hiring in trade unions. That make any sense to you?

[BREAK IN RECORDING OF INTERVIEW]

Specifically, the 1972 demonstrations grew out of a whole question of— [interruption]

The highways precipitated it, but the situation was the same. What had happened was we had gone through a period of two and a half years or so in this struggle, and the trade unions were finding ways to discourage those guys who were getting in. They would take in thirty guys, forty guys, fifty guys into the trades, and by the end of the year, all of them were out. And there were varying reasons for that. One of them was the hostility and the refusal or the inability of the trade union people to represent these guys. So then they then decided unilaterally not to take in—because of the economic conditions in this area, that they couldn't take in no more people. So our position was we're not going to keep fucking around with the courts, we're going to force their hand. We're going to close down some more jobs until they start agreeing to do the thing right. We'd been talking to the contractors specifically who were doing the highway construction, the I-90 project, and they refused to give, start taking people in. That was the reasons that we moved on in the first place.

[00:15:38] **WILLIAM:** So the attrition rate at that time was fairly heavy.

[00:15:41] **TYREE:** Oh, it was very high.

[00:15:42] **WILLIAM:** Okay. Do you have any data on that?

[00:15:45] **TYREE:** Yeah, we got some reports around here, you should get it from either [Michael] Woo or Fox. There were quarterly reports submitted by the—

[00:15:54] **WILLIAM:** EEOC [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission] ?

[00:15:55] **TYREE:** Well, now the EEOC does them, but at that time it was done by the attorney general. The Justice Department was handling the case until last year.

[00:16:09] **WILLIAM:** Okay. What was the outcome of that series of demonstrations?

[00:16:18] **TYREE:** Well, that was the time the UCWA got written into the order as having some authority to enforce the order, that construction workers had to come through UCWA in order to be indentured. We had to screen them to go into the program and to counsel in job disputes after they were into the program. That was the basic results of it. Our demand was that we have dispatch rights, because the trade unions were not representing the workers.

[00:16:57] **WILLIAM:** Did the court give you the rights?

[00:16:59] **TYREE:** There's an order, you should get a copy of the order from Michael Fox. In 1972, I think it was about August or September, and the response was given in the order. We were not given the dispatch rights. There was a watered down process where apprentices have to come to UCWA before going to the building trades. And that's still the case. We didn't win that. And that's been relatively helpful to us.

[BREAK IN RECORDING OF INTERVIEW]

That was around the Philadelphia Plan, the Hometown Plan situation. What happened was—and that's a good point, a good case. There had been a lot of negotiations going on about a Hometown Plan. See, what happens is the employers want to have Hometown Plans. If you have a Hometown Plan with a tri-party plan where three different groups, that is labor, management, and the “minority community” all agree on a mechanism for taking in federal workers into apprenticeship programs of trade unions, then there are no requirements to have a certain percentage of numbers on the job. A point of example, Bill is building a building with a hundred workers on the job. Under the imposed specifications, he'd have to have, say, ten percent; that means ten of those workers will have to be federal workers. But if you negotiate a plan that all parties—the minority community, trade unions, and management—agree with, then the fact that there's a plan and people in industry are signatory to that plan, then there's no requirements on a job-by-job basis. So what they're saying is that rather than a job-by-job, that they're going to take in a hundred people that year into the industry. So any one employer, they're not liable in his specific contract. Okay?

Well, that's not always a bad thing, but it's not always a good thing, either. So they asked us to negotiate that kind of a plan.

[00:19:40] **WILLIAM:** The Department of Labor asked you?

[00:19:41] **TYREE:** Right. They sent us a telegram from the Secretary of Labor asking us to involve ourselves in a negotiation. We made the incorrect mistake of going to—we decided, first of all, that that didn't mean just Black people, but Asians, and Natives, and Chicanos. So we went to those groups and asked them. But what we didn't do is we didn't go to those worker groups in the Asian community, the worker groups in the Chicano community. We went to community organizations. There was no UCWA in the Chicano community, for example. So we ended up with these petty bourgeois Chicanos on the end and Asians on there.

So what happened, quite frankly, was documented. We sat down and started negotiating. Milton Jefferson, in fact, was the guy in UCWA negotiating. He negotiated what was an acceptable agreement between us and the other three groups, the other three minority groups, and the trade unions, and management. The catch to it was the Labor Department, again, Robert McConnell and the group, the Manpower Division, was going to put a hundred thousand dollars into this Hometown Plan. So after the agreement was signed, Austin St. Laurent, the head of the building trades, took out the Indian and Chicano and a Native American—and offered them a job. And they accepted the jobs. The Chicano guy eventually quit, and another Chicano replaced him. But he took the job. The Indian guy worked there for two years. And the Asian guy, [?Marty Sibanga?] was the Asian's

name, the Indian's name was Robert Black, the Chicano's name was [?Alberto de Valle?] . They took the jobs. And so what the man had done was bought off the other people who were involved in the negotiations of the Hometown Plan, the minority groups. And so that left us—Milton Jefferson walked out of negotiations, and the Labor Department in relationship with the trade unions and management had ripped us off. So that's how we went to Washington [D.C.] .

[00:22:24] **WILLIAM:** What occurred while you were down there?

[00:22:26] **TYREE:** We took over the Secretary of Labor's office three days in a row, until he agreed to not give affirmative action sanction to the Hometown Plan. So they kept the Hometown Plan, but it didn't have affirmative approval, so the employers still had to have Black workers on the job. But eighteen of us drove back in cars and took it over.